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ABSTRACT

This report outlines a framework of widely accepted ideas about student learning. It describes the implications arising from good instruction and good local education support systems. It presents seven major points, beginning with the fact that all children can learn but their instruction in school largely determines what, how, and how much they learn. Furthermore, all children can attain to much higher standards than they are commonly held to, regardless of their race or ethnicity, family income, gender, primary language, or disability. Successful outcomes depend on good instruction bolstered by good local education support systems. Good instruction and good support systems underlie the notions that learning is a complex process interrelated with all aspects of development and that all children do not learn in the same way or at the same pace. Such systems are important components of the awareness that learning is active and requires effort and resilience on the part of the students, as well as interaction with teachers, texts, materials, and other learners. Learning depends on a foundation of factual knowledge, understanding in context, and the ability to organize facts and concepts so that they can be retrieved and applied, but it is not limited to school. Children's out-of-school experiences should accommodate this fact.(RJM)

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Generally Accepted Principles of Teaching and Learning

and their Implications for Local Education Support Systems

School Communities that Work:
A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts

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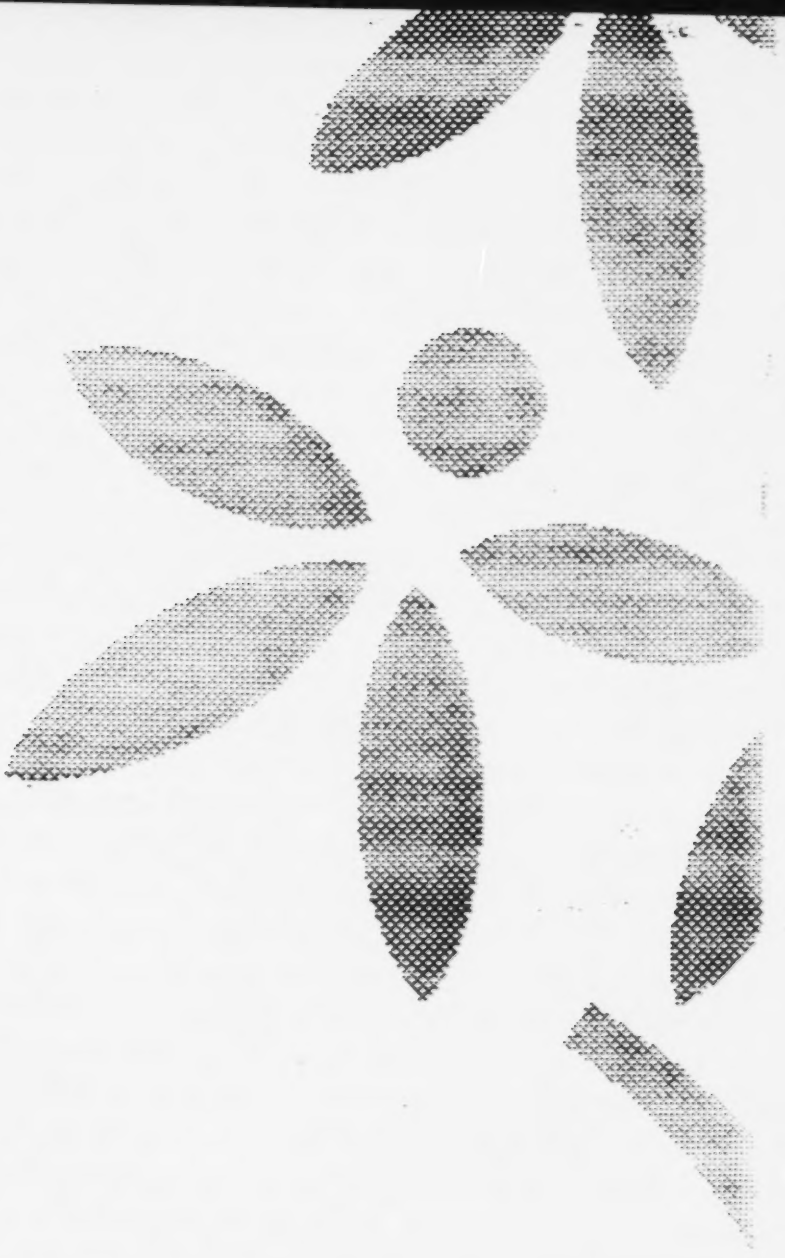

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School Communities that Work: A National Task Force on the Future of Urban Districts

was established in 2000 by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University to examine an element of the public education system that has often been overlooked: the urban school district. The primary goals of the Task Force are to help create, support, and sustain entire urban communities of high-achieving schools and to stimulate a national conversation to promote the development and implementation of school communities that do, in fact, work for all children.

To help imagine what high-achieving school communities would look like and how to create them, the Task Force convened influential leaders from the education, civic, business, and nonprofit communities to study three critical areas: building capacity for teaching and learning; developing family and community supports; and organizing, managing, and governing schools and systems.

The following Task Force members and staff contributed to the development of this article. The lead writer was Ellen Foley, Principal Associate, Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

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For more information on the School Communities that Work Task Force, visit our Web site at www.schoolcommunities.org

The Task Force believes that student learning is the cornerstone of everything that adults do in a "school community that works." To show how this overriding principle works in action, we have compiled a framework of widely accepted ideas about student learning and spelled out their implications for good instruction and for good local education support systems. What we envision as a "local education support system" might include a district central office (possibly reorganized from its traditional role) but also encompasses a variety of local organizations and/or individuals who provide schools with significant, ongoing support for student learning.

I. All children learn.

INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOL is a major influence on what, how, and how much children learn.

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- recognize the importance of high-quality instruction and thus
  - develop policies, contracts, and procedures intended to ensure that every child has qualified teachers
  - establish structures or mechanisms to measure the contributions of all staff in order to connect educators' practice with student achievement
  - identify or help schools identify expert teachers and principals and processes for drawing on their expertise; for example, by putting them into mentoring and leadership positions
  - intervene when the performance of an educator or school is consistently poor
- provide all children with ongoing and varied learning supports and opportunities
- provide all children access to the full range of the curriculum

II. All children can learn to much higher standards than they are now commonly held to, regardless of their race or ethnicity, family income, gender, primary language, or disability.

GOOD INSTRUCTION makes the goals for learning clear and comprehensible to students, parents, and the broader community.

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- provide a core instructional framework that defines the knowledge and competencies students should acquire and that guides instruction
- make the obligations and rights of learners, families, and communities clear
- allocate resources such as materials, time, and staff assignments to advance the core instructional framework and to avoid diffuse, scattered improvement efforts
- require formative and summative assessments to be congruent with the learning goals laid out in the core instructional framework

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III. Learning is a complex process interrelated with all aspects of development, including cognitive, social, and emotional development.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

- recognizes the affective aspects of learning and thus helps establish
  - comfortable, efficient routines well known to students
  - norms that make learning a primary value in the classroom and school
  - learning communities made up of adults and students who feel safe taking risks with each other, supporting each other's learning, and working cooperatively
- draws out and draws on children's cultural backgrounds and preconceptions
- builds on students' knowledge and prior experiences by presenting them with "just manageable difficulties"; that is, activities or assignments that are challenging to students, but not so hard as to be discouraging

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- recognize that successful policy implementation involves teaching and learning on the part of adults; therefore, they structure their policies, contracts, and procedures to meet the developmental needs of their staffs by
  - making connections with aspects of educators' lives outside of school
  - drawing on their cultural backgrounds and preconceptions
  - building on their knowledge and prior experiences
- have social norms that value the search for understanding and see errors as valuable sources for learning
- have staffs that model the kind of positive relationships and continuous learning that they seek to develop in students
- encourage the development of strong teacher leadership and distributed leadership in schools

IV. All children do not learn in the same ways or at the same pace.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

- draws from a wide repertoire of teaching strategies to tailor instruction to the needs of different students
- provides students instructional choices and multiple ways to engage with content to help them take ownership of their learning and demonstrate competence
- relies on ongoing formative assessment data to inform students of their progress, and to help identify the areas where further instruction and inquiry should be focused
- recognizes that learning is subject-sensitive: children don't simply learn, they learn to dance, to paint, to do mathematics, to read and critique text, to build tables, and to write stories; *what* students are learning is an important variable in the learning process

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- offer differentiated supports based on the needs of particular students and schools

- recognize that it's not only children who vary in the ways they learn – adults also vary in the ways they learn; thus, policies, contracts, and procedures should
  - be flexible enough to adapt to the varied conditions, capacities, and attitudes of school staffs
  - allow flexibility in school organization and staff working conditions
  - provide instructional supports that balance the need for teacher creativity and decision making with the need for some systemwide consistency and comparative assessment
- use data to inform decision making, interventions, and curricular and programmatic choices

V. Learning is active. It requires effort and resilience on the part of the student as well as interaction with teachers, texts, materials, and/or other learners.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

- promotes this interaction by maximizing opportunities for students to engage in their learning, rather than passively absorb information
- helps illuminate the metacognitive processes – the reflection, or "internal dialogue" – that we use to assimilate new information, make connections with pre-existing knowledge, and develop thoughts and ideas
- helps encourage modes of participation that may be unfamiliar or culturally counterintuitive to some students

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- organize in-service professional development around the same learning principles we expect teachers to employ with students
- make student motivation for learning (as well as the factors affecting it) a primary concern

VI. Learning depends on a foundation of factual knowledge, the understanding of concepts in context, and the organization of facts and concepts so that they can be retrieved and applied.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

- balances the need for conceptual understanding with the need for "automaticity": for example, memorization of multiplication tables is important for application and fluency, but by itself does not necessarily promote understanding of the mathematical concepts underlying multiplication
- requires an in-depth understanding of the learning process as well as a strong basis in the subject or skill area being taught
- includes assessments that reveal students' conceptual understanding in addition to their factual knowledge and memorization

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- emphasize intellectual quality over techniques and procedures
- create mechanisms or procedures that help schools and educators become good consumers of professional development options and instructional materials and supports

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VII. Learning is not limited to school. It can happen anywhere.

GOOD INSTRUCTION

- incorporates children's out-of-school experiences in school with lessons that have value beyond school
- is connected as much as possible to settings in the community that enhance learning for children and adults both inside and outside of school

GOOD LOCAL EDUCATION SUPPORT SYSTEMS

- provide education for the whole community – including parents and other stakeholders – about new expectations, new standards, and new instructional approaches
- recognize that there is much to be gained from understanding students' other learning environments, such as out-of-school settings, and the community's cultural, linguistic, and social assets

This document draws heavily from:

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